THE FORMS OF TAWAFFĀ IN THE QUR'ĀN: A CONTRIBUTION TO CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE

Introduction

Sūrat Āl 'Imrān (3):55, "Allah said: O Jesus! Lo! I am gathering thee and causing thee to ascend unto Me . . ." [*idh qāla Allāhu yā 'Īsā innī mutawaffīka wa rāfi'uka ilayya . . .*], has, understandably, been a focus of attention in Muslim-Christian dialogue. This essay briefly surveys a variety of (mostly Western) interpretations, provides some lexicographical notes, deals with actual usage of *tawaffā* in the Qur'ān, and concludes that the Qur'ān uses *tawaffā* in situations where the focus is upon premature death with a progression in the direction of connoting the providential dimension of the end of a person's life.

Some Recent Studies

O'Shaughnessy,[2] Welch,[3] and Roest Crollius[4] have discussed the meanings of *tawaffā* and its forms in connection with their helpful studies on death in the Qur'ān. O'Shaughnessy suggests that *tawaffā* combines the ideas of "seizing" or "making to die" with the idea of "filling out a full term" on the part of the deceased. He, following many others, relates the two texts where *mutawaffā* is used in connection with Jesus (S. 3:55 and S. 5:117) to Muḥammad's meeting with the Christian delegation from Najran. These discussions, relating more to monotheism than to the question of atonement, leave the question of Jesus' death ambiguous.[5] Welch, whose conclusions are in general agreement with those of O'Shaughnessy, focuses on death in the Qur'ān, and on the agency of angels in the question of death and not specifically on verses related to the final episode of Jesus' mission. According to him, *tawaffā* "occurs almost exclusively with the specific meaning 'to take at death.'"[6] Roest Crollius's article, while an exercise in Christian dialogue, is in a collection of studies addressing death in the various religious traditions. It, therefore, seeks to show for Islam "how the

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[1] We have supplied the emphasis. Unless otherwise noted English translations are from Muhammad M. Pickthall (1977). Ary A. Roest Crollius points out the variety of ways in which *tawaffā* and its several forms are rendered into English by the various English translations or interpretations of the Qur'ān. Pickthall offers "to gather" (S. 3:55), "to receive" (S. 8:50), "to take" (S. 4:15), "to cause to die" (S. 40:77; S. 10:46, 104), "to make die" (S. 3:193), "to die (young)" (S. 22:5) and "to be about to die" (S. 2:240) (Roest Crollius, "Death as a Theme in the Qur'anic Preaching," *Studia Missionalia*, XXXI (1982), 161-85, sec. 165, n. 17.

[2] Thomas O'Shaughnessy, *Muhammad's Thoughts on Death: A Thematic Study of the Qur'anic Data* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969).

[3] Alford T. Welch, "Death and Dying in the Qur'ān," in Frank E. Reynolds and Earle E. Waugh, eds., *Religious Encounters with Death: Insights from the History and Anthropology of Religions* (University Park/London: Penn State University Press, 1977), pp. 183-99.

[4] Crollius, "Death as a Theme in Qur'anic Preaching," 161-85.

[5] O'Shaughnessy, *Muhammad's Thoughts on Death*, pp. 37, 41.

[6] Welch, "Death and Dying in the Qur'ān," p. 190.

surrender to God in life is accomplished in death."[7] Roest Crollius chooses to translate *tawaffā* and its forms in their most generic sense, "to take away" or "to take to oneself."[8] He leaves the question of the interpretation of Sūrat Āl 'Imrān verse 55 [S. 3:55] open, but concludes that "Jesus is not dead. He is alive in body and soul. . . ."[9]

Räisänen,[10] Schedl,[11] and Ayoub[12] focus, not on death, but on Jesus. They too must touch on the verse under discussion here in connection with what they have to say about him. Räisänen concludes that *tawaffā* and its forms in the Qur'ān refer without exception to death.[13] Because he cannot make the phrases *mā qatalūhu* ("they did not kill him") and *mā ṣalabūhu* ("they did not crucify him") (S. 4:157) mean anything other than their most obvious meaning, he concludes that, according to the Qur'ān, Jesus was not killed on the cross, but did actually die and was called home (*abberufen*) in one way or another.[14] Schedl, on the other hand, arguing for a clearly gnostic influence on Muḥammad, is convinced that *tawaffā* in the context of Sūrat Āl 'Imrān does not mean death, but overcoming death.[15] Relying on the Hebrew cognate verb *yāfā*, "to be beautiful" or "whole" (*schön, heil sein*), which in the intensive form has the meaning to decorate, trim or adorn (*schmücken*), Schedl translates *mutawaffika, "ich verkläre dich,"* "I will transfigure you."[16] Ayoub examines many Muslim commentaries and concludes that S. 3:15 "clearly states an end to Jesus' life followed by a celestial life with God."[17] While rejecting Jesus' sacrificial death on a cross, Ayoub argues, Islam leaves open the question of his actual death. He maintains that Islam denies neither the death of Christ nor "his general redemptive role in human history."[18] Like J. M. Ritchie, whose position is discussed immediately below, Ayoub associates *tawaffā* with "reclaiming a debt or charge in its entirety."[19] But he also thinks that interpreting *mutawaffika* to mean "I am causing you to die" is possible.[20]

J. M. Ritchie[21] focuses specifically on *tawaffā* and its forms in relation to the

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[7] Crollius, "Death as a Theme in Qur'anic Preaching," 162.

[8] Ibid., 165.

[9] Ibid., 185.

[10] Heikke Räisänen, *Das Koranische Jesusbild: Ein Beitrag zur Theologie des Korans.* [Schriften der Finnischen Gesellschaft fur Missiologie und Ökumenik, XX] (Helsinki: Finnische Gesellschaft fur Missiologie und Ökumenik, 1971); and "The Portrait of Jesus in the Qur'ān," *MW*, LXX (1980), 122-33.

[11] Claus Schedl, *Muhammad und Jesus: die christologisch relevanten Texte des Korans* (Vienna: Herder, 1978).

[12] Mahmoud Ayoub, "Toward an Islamic Christology, II," *MW*, LXX (1980), 91-121.

[13] Räisänen, *Das Koranische Jesusbild*, p. 68.

[14] Ibid., p. 70.

[15] Schedl, *Muhammad und Jesus*, pp. 435-36.

[16] Ibid., p. 436.

[17] Ayoub, "Toward an Islamic Christology," 107.

[18] Ibid., 94.

[19] Ibid., 107.

[20] Ibid., 106-107.

[21] J.M. Ritchie, "Some Thoughts on the Word 'Tawaffā' as Used by the Qur'an," *The Bulletin of Christian Institutes of Islamic Studies*, XLIV (1970), 9-19.

death of Jesus, concluding with Elder,[22] ʿAbd al-Tafāhum[23] [Kenneth Cragg] and Parrinder[24] that *mutawaffā* in S. 3:55 indicates that Jesus died. Pointing out the connection of *tawaffā* with *waffā*, he stresses the dimension of "full payment" in its meaning. Using the analogy of other fifth form verbs, Ritchie concludes that *tawaffāhu Allāhu* means "God has caused him to die with a view to his rising again to judgment."[25] Ritchie's argument would be plausible if it could be confirmed by appealing to actual usage. The lexical and Qurʾanic study offered in this essay stresses usage and context and leads in a different direction.

Lexical Considerations

Mutawaffīka is the active participle of the verb *tawaffā*, the fifth form from the root *wfy* which conveys the idea of fulfillment, execution, and completion.[26] Meanings given for the fifth form are "to reach or complete something (for example, a term)," "to take all of something (for example, money) from someone," and, when God is the subject and a human person is the object, "to take up in death."[27]

The fifth form, the reflexive of the second, in general "expresses the state into which the object of the action denoted by the second form is brought by that action, as its effect or result."[28] For example, *tawaffā ḥaqqahu* means "he received/took all that was due him."

Waffā, form two, can take two objects, as in *waffā al-rajula ḥaqqahu*, "he gave the man all that was due him." It appears that *tawaffā*, form five, takes one object, either of the two objects which form two can take. *Tawaffā ḥaqqahu* means "he took all that was due him." Switching to a sentence using the first person may shed some light on these distinctions: *tawaffaytu min fulānin mā lī ʿalayhi* means, "I took or received from Fulan all that he owed me," which is like saying, *tawaffaytu al-shayʾa*, "I completed or finished the thing." It is also possible to say *tawaffā al-rajula*, which is hard to translate, being something like, "he took everything from the man." We know that the man has given all to the subject of the sentence, but we do not know of what he has been depleted. Also, the word "took" could as easily be replaced by "received," since there is not necessarily any force or demand implied. Furthermore, we can use the passive to focus on the condition of the man: *tuwuffiya al-rajalu* (even harder to translate), "the man was in a condition resulting from having given all." We could also say, "the man was used up, depleted, or

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[22] E.E. Elder, "The Crucifixion in the Koran," *MW*, XIII (1923), 242-58.

[23] ʿAbd al-Tafāhum, "The Qurʾān and the Holy Communion," *MW*, XL (1959), 239-48.

[24] Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qurʾan* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1965).

[25] Ritchie, "Some Thoughts," 14.

[26] The cognate root in Hebrew, *yfh*, signifies "whole," "wholesome," and "beautiful" (Roest Crollius, "Death as a Theme," 165, n. 14).

[27] Muḥammad b. al-Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 20 vols. (Cairo, 1889), XX, 280.

[28] W. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, trans. from German of Caspari and edited by W. Robertson Smith and M.J. de Goeje, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896, 1898), II, 36.

spent." Dozy offers a parallel construction in the following example: *kharajtu aṭlubu rizqī/ wa wajadtu rizqī tuwuffīya*, "I went out seeking for my rations/ And found my rations all gone."[29] The *mutawaffī* (active participle from *tawaffā*) was the "taker," "receiver" or "consumer" of all the subject's rations, and the depleted rations were the *mutawaffā* (passive participle).

Tawaffā is used in connection with death because in death God is the agent (al-mutawaffī) of the completion/depletion of the person (*al-mutawaffā*) who has died (*alladhī tuwuffīya*). This also shows why the verbal noun, *tawaffīn*, does not mean death or dying, but "taking/receiving." The word for death from this root is *wafāt* a verbal noun from the first form *wafā* "to complete," "fulfill," or "pay."

We also see the force of the dual-object character of *waffā*, second form, showing up in the fifth form, which, when applied to the death of a person (*al-mutawaffā*), is open to two interpretations. Ibn Manẓūr says, "We say *tuwuffīya fulān* and *tawaffāhu Allāh* when He takes his soul. . . . Others say, '*tawaffā* the deceased means the completion of [the] period of life which has been allotted him (*wufīyat lahu*) and the number of his days and his months and years in this world.' "[30]

In other words, according to this analysis there are two possible ways of understanding *tawaffā* in relation to death: 1) on the analogy of *tawaffā ḥaqqahu*, that is, "he took all that was due him"; or 2) on the analogy of *tawaffā al-shay'a*, "he finished or used up the thing." In both cases there is an emphasis on completeness, and in both there is an important connection between the *mutawaffī* and the *mutawaffā*.

One reason for the controversy over the meaning of S. 3:55 is that *mutawaffīka* looks to the average reader as though it means "I will take you in death," a translation that appeals especially to Christians[31] and has some attestation in the early Muslim exegetical (tafsīr) traditions.[32] At the same time it does not necessarily have to imply death since, literally, *mutawaffīka* means "I will be the agent (taker/recipient) of your completeness." For the English translation we have to supply something; this could be "your life," but it could as well be "your mission," which would fit with the Muslim majority interpretation of the passage. This latter interpretation is also attested in early tafsir traditions and is preferred by al-Ṭabarī.[33] It is also congruent with the common sense meaning of Sūrat al-Nisā' (4):157, "They slew him not, nor crucified him."

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[29] R. Dozy, *Supplement aux Dictionaires Arabes*, 2 vols. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1881), II, 833 B.

[30] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, XX, 280.

[31] See Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'ān*, 105-21 and Ritchie, "Some Thoughts," 9-19.

[32] Ibn ʿAbbās and Wahb b. Munabbih, two early authorities on Qur'ān interpretation, held that *mutawaffīka* meant in this context, "I shall cause you to die." Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl Āyāt al-Qurʾān*, Muḥammad Shākir and Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, eds., 9 vols., Turāth al-Islām (Cairo, 1971), VI, 457.

[33] Ibid.

The Qur'anic Data

With this in mind, let us turn to the Qur'anic data in *tawaffā* in its various forms.

With two exceptions,[34] *tawaffā* occurs in the Qur'ān in the sense "to take or complete someone in death," and in over half of the passages God is the *mutawaffī*, or the agent of death.[35] Sūrat Yūnus, verse 104[36] represents an example:

> Say (O Muhammad): O mankind! If ye are in doubt of my religion, then (know that) I worship not those whom ye worship instead of Allah, but I worship Allah Who causeth you to die *(wa lākin a'budu Allāha al-ladhī yatawaffākum)*, and I have been commanded to be of the believers.

O'Shaughnessey[37] identifies nine texts in which the agent of death is an angel or angels,[38] all except one of which (S. 6:93) make use of the term *tawaffā*. Sample verses include the following:

> He is the Omnipotent over His slaves. He sendeth guardians over you until, when death cometh unto one of you, Our messengers receive him *(tawaffathu rusuluna)*, and they neglect not. (S. 6:61)
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> Whom the angels cause to die *(al-ladhīna tatawaffāhum al-malā'ikatu)* while they are wronging themselves. Then will they make full submission (saying): We used not to do any wrong. Nay! Surely Allah is the Knower of what ye used to do. (S. 16:28)
>
> Say: The angel of death, who hath charge concerning you, will gather you *(yatawaffākum malāku al-mawti)*, and afterward unto your Lord ye will be returned. (S. 32:11)[39]

There is even a context in which death itself is personified as the *mutawaffī*, although the participle itself is not used:

> As for those of your women who are guilty of lewdness, call to witness four of you against them. And if they testify . . . then confine them to the houses until death take them *(ḥatta yatawaffāhunna al-mawt)* or (until) Allah appoint for them a way. . . . (S. 4:15)

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[34] S. 6:60 and 39:42. Ritchie sees four passages relating to sleep, but two of the verses he cites, S. 16:70 and 22:5, discussed below, refer directly to death ("Some Thoughts," 11).

[35] See Welch, "Death and Dying," 190 and Roest Crollius, "Death as a Theme," 178.

[36] Late Meccan.

[37] O'Shaughnessy, *Muhammad's Thoughts on Death*, pp. 39-40.

[38] S. 4:97 (Medinan); S. 6:61 (Late Meccan); S. 6:93 (Late Meccan [or Medinan]); S. 7:37 (Late Meccan); S. 8:50 (Medinan); S. 16:28 (Late Meccan); S. 16:32 (Late Meccan); S. 32:11 (Middle Meccan); S. 47:27 (Medinan).

[39] Note that *tatawaffāhum* (S. 16:28) and *yatawaffākum* (S. 32:11) are translated in two different ways here by Pickthall.

Welch resolves the apparent contradiction of agents by reference to the Biblical scholars' concept of "corporate personality." That is to say, "when the agents act, God acts."[40]

Three texts represent Joseph, Pharoah's magicians, and an indefinite group of Muslims petitioning God to let them die in a state of submission, or when they are among the just.[41] Here is an example from Sūrat Yūsuf:

> O my Lord! Thou hast given me (something) of sovereignty and hast taught me (something) of the interpretation of events—Creator of the heavens and the earth! Thou art my Protecting Friend in the world and the Hereafter. Make me to die submissive (unto Thee) *(tawaffāni musliman),* and join me to the righteous. (S. 12:101)

In the two passages sleep is seen as a temporary death. Again a form of the word *tawaffā* is used in each passage:[42]

The first is from Sūrat al-Anʿām:

> He it is Who gathereth you at night *(wa huwa al-ladhī yatwaffākum bi al-layl)* and knoweth that which ye commit by day. Then He raiseth you again to life therein, that the term appointed (for you) may be accomplished *(li yuqḍā ajalun musamman).* And afterward unto Him is your return. Then He will proclaim unto you what ye used to do. He is the Omnipotent over His slaves. He sendeth guardians over you until, when death cometh unto one of you, Our messengers receive him *(tawaffathu rusuluna),* and they neglect not. (S. 6:60)

The second passage, from Sūrat al-Zumar, Welch[43] considers the most important verse for understanding *tawaffā*:

> Allah receiveth . . . souls *(Allāhu yatawaffā al-anfusa)* at the time of their deaths, and that (soul) which dieth not (yet) in its sleep *(wa al-latī lam tamut fī manāmihā).* He keepeth that (soul) for which he hath ordained death *(al-lati qaḍā ʿalayhā al-mawt)* and dismisseth the rest till an appointed term *(ilā ajalin musamman).* Lo! herein verily are portents for people who take thought. (S. 39:42)

Clearly we are dealing here with the fact that sleep is a little death and that whether one sleeps, awakens or dies, one lives in accordance with divine providence. In the first, sleep is modeled after death, judgment, and resurrection, and those who awaken to go on living do so in accordance with a "term appointed." In the second, the time of death is the primary focus, but here, as in

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[40] Welch, "Death and Dying," 192. This interpretation is borne out in S. 3:45-47 where "angels" (45) dissolves into "My Lord" (47). Cf. Genesis 18:1-33.

[41] S. 12:101 (Late Meccan [or Middle Meccan]); S. 7:126 (Late Meccan); and S. 3:193 (Medinan).

[42] S. 6:60 (Late Meccan); S. 39:42 (Middle Meccan or Late Meccan).

[43] Welch, "Death and Dying," 187.

the first instance, sleep is almost a time of inspection. *Fa-yumsiku al-latī qaḍā ʿalayhā* (that is, *al-anfus*) *al-mawta* ("He keepeth that [soul] for which he hath ordained death") in the second passage is almost equivalent to *yatawaffā al-anfusa* ("He receiveth souls") in the same verse.

Note that in both of the following passages the passive *yutawaffā* is used for those who die young:

> O mankind! If ye are in doubt concerning the Resurrection, then lo! We have created you from dust, then from a drop of seed, then from a clot, then from a little lump of flesh shapely and shapeless, that We may make (it) clear for you. And We cause what We will to remain in the wombs for an appointed time, and afterward We bring you forth as infants, then (give you growth) that ye attain your full strength. And among you there is he who dieth (young) *[wa minkum man yutawaffā]*, and among you there is he who is brought back to the most abject time of life, so that, after knowledge, he knoweth naught. And thou (Muḥammad) seest the earth barren, but when We send down water thereon, it doth thrill and swell and put forth every lovely kind (of growth). (S. 22:5)[44]
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> He it is Who created you from dust, then from a drop (of seed), then from a clot, then bringeth you forth as a child, then (ordaineth) that ye attain full strength and afterward that ye become old men—though some among you die before *[wa minkum man yutawaffā min qabluj]*—and that ye reach an appointed term, that haply ye may understand. (S. 40:67)[45]

Two other passages (from the Meccan period) which belong in this category do not use a form of *tawaffā*. The first reads as follows:

> Allah created you from dust, then from a little fluid, then He made you pairs (the male and female). No female beareth or bringeth forth save with His knowledge. And no one groweth old who groweth old nor is aught lessened of his life, but it is recorded in a Book [*mā yuʿammaru min muʿammarin wa la yunqaṣu min ʿumurihi illā fī kitābin*]. Lo! that is easy for Allah. (S. 35:11)

The second is the only one of these passages in which *amātahu,* "he causes him to die," is used:

> From what thing doth He create him? / From a drop of seed. / He createth him and proportioneth him, / Then maketh the way easy for him. / Then causeth him to die *[amātahu]* and burieth him; / Then, when he will, He bringeth him again to life. (S. 80:18-22)

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[44] Late Meccan or Medinan.

[45] Middle Meccan.

In the second passage, where *amātahu* is used, there is no sense of timing in the death. The simple fact is that God controls the destiny of humanity from creation to resurrection.

Among six passages which refer to the possibility of the Prophet's death, three use a form of *tawaffā*.[46] In the three which do not use a form of *tawaffā*[47] the fact or possibility of Muḥammad's death is stressed. For example, Sūrat al-Anbiyā' verse 34, reads "We appointed immortality for no mortal before thee. What if thou diest, can they be immortal?" [*afā-in mitta fa-humu al-khālidūna*].

The three passages in which a form of *tawaffā* is used stress the possibility of Muḥammad's death *before the fruition of his efforts*. For example, one of these very similar verses reads:

> Whether we let thee see something of that which we have promised them, or make thee die (before its happening) *[aw natawaffayannaka]*,[48] thine is but conveyance (of the message), Ours the reckoning. (S. 13:40)

In two passages the passive, *yutawaffawna*, is used of those who die and leave wives behind them.[49] While the focus in these two passages is on the procedures for freeing the widows after a period of waiting, nevertheless, it is possible that the use of *yutawaffawna* indicates that their husbands' lives were cut short.

> Such of you as die *[yutawaffawna]* and leave behind them wives, they (the wives) shall wait, keeping themselves apart, four months and ten days. And when they reach the term (prescribed for them) then there is no sin for you in aught that they may do with themselves in decency. Allah is Informed of what ye do. (S. 2:234)
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> (In the case of) those of you who are about to die *[yutawaffawna]* and leave behind them wives,[50] they should bequeath unto their wives a provision for the year without turning them out, but if they go out (of their own accord) there is no sin for you in that which they do of themselves within their rights. Allah is Mighty, Wise. (S. 2:240)

The passage about Jesus in Sūrat al-Mā'ida[51] in which a form of *tawaffā* is used appears to fit into this category also. Jesus is being asked by God whether he is responsible for his followers' practice of worshipping Mary, his mother, and himself. He answers that he spoke only what God had commanded him, namely, "Worship Allāh, my Lord and your Lord." "I was a witness of them," he goes on to say, "while I dwelt among them, and when Thou tookest me *[fa lammā tawaffaytanī]* Thou wast the Watcher over them. . . ." Again *tawaffā* is connected with the timing of the end.

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[46] S. 10:46 (Late Meccan); S. 13:40 (Late Meccan) and S. 40:77 (Middle Meccan).

[47] S. 67:28 (Middle or Early Meccan); S. 21:34 (Middle Meccan); and S. 3:144 (Medinan).

[48] Pickthall supplies the temporal clause which is implied in the context.

[49] S. 2:234 (Medinan) and S. 2:240 (Medinan).

[50] This phrase and the initial phrase in S. 2:234 are identical in the original, although Pickthall's English renderings differ slightly. See also note 1 above.

[51] S. 5:117 (Medinan).

Conclusions

Several observations can be made from this survey of the Qur'anic data.

1. With the possible exception of the two verses where *tawaffā* is used in connection with the "death" or "taking" of Jesus,[52] every instance in the Qur'ān where a form of *tawaffā* is used involves a relationship to death. In two passages it is related to sleep,[53] but even in these passages, the sleep is related to death. In both passages sleep is talked about along with death as though it were part of the process of death, yet it is a significant enough part of the process to be used as a synonym for it.

2. There is a possible chronological progression of the use of *tawaffā* and its derivatives from its not being used at all in the Early Meccan period,[54] to its being used in the Middle Meccan,[55] late Meccan,[56] and Medinan[57] periods in a way that develops progressively in the direction of identifying *tawaffā* with dying.

3. Of the eighteen occurrences of *tawaffā* and its forms which are not connected with angels as agents of death, or with sleep, twelve are in contexts where they appear to be related to the timing of death[58] or to situations in which a person's life is cut short and does not reach a normal span.[59] In the passages in which God's ordering of human development from creation to resurrection is mentioned,[60] *tawaffā* is used for those individuals who do not reach a normal life span. But *tawaffā* is used precisely to point to the completion of that individual's life in the providence of God. In the case of Muḥammad,[61] when the possibility of his life's being cut short is in view, *tawaffā* is used. Even in the case of the legislation regarding the wives of those who have passed on[62] the fact that their lives have been, or are to be, cut off seems to require the use of *yutawaffawna.*

4. Of the twelve occurrences of *tawaffā* just discussed, two are in the Middle Meccan period,[63] one in either the Middle or late Meccan period,[64] three in the late Meccan period,[65] one in either the late Meccan or the Medinan periods,[66] and five

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[52] S. 3:55; S. 5:117.

[53] S. 6:60 and 39:42 (see note 34 above).

[54] S. 35:11; S. 80:18-22 and 67:28 (Middle Meccan?) are passages from this period which use alternative expressions where some form of *tawaffā* would seem appropriate.

[55] S. 12:101; S. 21:34; S. 32:11; S. 39:42 (Late Meccan?); S. 40:67, 77; S. 67:28 (Early Meccan?).

[56] S. 6:60, 61, 93 (Medinan?); S. 7:37, 126; S. 10:46, 104; S. 12:101 (Middle Meccan?); S. 13:40; S. 16:28, 32; S. 22:5 (Medinan?); S. 39:42 (Middle Meccan?).

[57] S. 2:234, 240; S. 3:55, 144, 193; S. 4:97; S. 5:117; S. 6:93 (Late Meccan?); S. 8:50; S. 22:5 (Late Meccan?); S. 47:27.

[58] S. 2:234, 240; S. 3:193; S. 5:117; S. 7:126; S. 12:101.

[59] S. 3:55; S. 10:46; S. 13:40; S. 22:5; S. 40:67, 77.

[60] S. 22:5; S. 40:67.

[61] S. 10:46; S. 13:40; S. 40:77.

[62] S. 12:234, 240.

[63] S. 40:67, 77.

[64] S. 12:101.

[65] S. 7:126; S. 10:46; S. 13:40.

[66] S. 22:5.

in the Medinan period.[67] The evidence seems to point to a progression in the direction of using *tawaffā* to designate the providential dimension of the end of a person's life.

In short, when a person's life is taken by God or His angels in death, it is a complete life, even if, when measured by the usual span of human life, it is short.

If *tawaffaytanī* in Sūrat al-Mā'ida verse 117, and *mutawaffīka* in Sūrat Āl 'Imrān verse 55, do not refer to the death of Jesus in the providential ordering of God, then they are the only incidences of the use of a form of *tawaffā* in the Qur'ān not connected with death. While this word study certainly does not prove that Jesus died providentially in connection with the plot of the unbelievers mentioned in the verses under discussion, it at least clarifies why several modern (mostly Western) commentators and some ancient Islamic traditionalists have concluded that *mutawaffīka* means "I will cause you to die."

Also, the usage of *tawaffā* in these verses is to some extent parallel to three passages in which the Prophet Muḥammad is comforted in facing the possibility of premature death.[68]

Furthermore, the analysis presented above of the two-fold meaning of *tawaffā*, based on its being the reflexive of *waffā* which takes two objects, shows that it was used in connection with death in the senses of 1) taking/receiving the soul of the deceased and 2) completing the period of life which has been alloted to him or her.[69] The meaning of *mutawaffīka* in Sūrat Āl 'Imrān verse 55 could be as adequately served by assuming that God completed Jesus' earthly mission without actual death as it would be assuming that He caused him to die.

Finally, while the most natural interpretation of Sūrat Āl 'Imrān verse 55 is that God took Jesus in death as part of a plan to foil his enemies,[70] even this interpretation of the passage does not necessarily mean that the Qur'ān implies that Jesus was crucified. Even if it is true that Sūrat al-Nisā' verses 157–58 can be interpreted as a denial of the Jews' claim to have gotten the victory over Jesus by crucifying him, rather than a denial of his death on the cross, we still have to confront the fact that the Qur'ān nowhere addresses unambiguously the event of the Crucifixion which, according to the canonical Christian Gospels, is central to Jesus' mission, Jesus' virgin birth, miracles, message and confirmation of the Torah are explicitly affirmed by the Qur'ān. While the Qur'ān clearly denies his deity and sonship, it does not unambiguously deny or affirm his death. If the Qur'ān is understood as affirming his death in Āl 'Imrān, it reveals that, by that death, God saved Jesus and not others. If, on the other hand, it is the claim of the

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[67] S. 2:234, 240; S. 3:55, 144; S. 5:117.

[68] S. 10:46; S. 13:40 and 40:77.

[69] See above, pages 5 and 6.

[70] The word *rāfi'uka* which follows *mutawaffīka* in the verse under discussion is not a word used for resurrection in the Qur'ān, but for ascension or raising in rank, for example S. 6:165; S. 19:57. In S. 4:158 *rafa'ahu* is used: "they slew him not for certain. But Allah *took him up unto* Himself. . . ." J.M. Ritchie ("Some Thoughts," 18) maintains that the idea of resurrection is implied or included in the term *mutawaffīka*, but his argument is not compelling.

Jews to have triumphed over Jesus, and not his crucifixion as such, which Sūrat al-Nisā' verses 157–58 are taken to deny, it is still only the rescue of Jesus that is affirmed in the Qur'ān.

John Wansborough, who sees "the earliest formulation of Muslim identity . . . in the *sīra* and *maghāzī* literature,"[71] provides an analysis of the episode concerning the Christian delegation from Najrān in the *Sīra* of Ibn Isḥāq[72] to which a selection of verses from Sūrat Āl 'Imrān is appended. Even though he thinks the sūra and the story have separate origins, he concludes that the primitive disputation between the Muslims and the Christians from Najrān reveals no emphasis on the atonement at all. Rather, their discussion is focused exclusively on the incarnation and the trinity. The very ambiguity of the meaning of *mutawaffīka* in Sūrat Āl 'Imrān is congruent with that conclusion.

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[71] John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* [London Oriental Series, Vol. 34] (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 102.

[72] Muḥammad Ibn Isḥāq, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, Muṣṭafā *al-Saqqā*, Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī and 'Abd al-Ḥāfiẓ Shalabī, eds., 2 vols. (Cairo, 1955), I, 573-84 (Eng. trans. Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad* [Lahore: Oxford University Press, 1955], 270-77).